

Pentecost – From Ashes to New Life.

Three hundred years ago, a great experiment was taking place. European people were learning from the Haudenosaunee about democracy. What if these Scottish and Irish, German and English, Welsh and French, Swedish and more peoples built a confederacy like the Haudenosaunee peoples had? A unity in diversity? An equality instead of hierarchy? France and the colonies of America decided to try it out.

Simultaneously, across the colonies and Great Britain, people asked... could our churches be equal instead of hierarchical? Could we have democratic churches? People began to try out new ways of being the church. Here and there - no more rows and pews. Instead, people tried circles and chairs. Here and there - no more ancient songs. They tried modern songs, contemporary songs, new hymns. They tried no more chant and multiple part harmonies - but wondered what worship with different musical instruments like pianos and organs would sound like. They experimented with prayer styles - with worship format - with whether or not we even need a church building but can just use a tent, or a stump, or a living room.

They broke social boundaries. If in Christ there is no longer male or female - then women should be ordained. If in Christ there is no longer slave and free - then blacks and whites should worship together. If in Christ there is no longer young and old - then an old preacher has the same authority as a young child. Both equally can access God and share prophetic insight.

Over the decades, the experiments took different names. Names like...

Evangelical - for the groups that focused on the good news that anyone who fully owned up to their sins and asked forgiveness would be forgiven by God.

Pentecostal - for the groups that focused on the Holy Spirit and a personal encounter with God that makes one born-again, baptised with the Spirit, and committed to living a holy life.

Methodist - for the groups that approached a holy life methodically and with rules on their lives. Why are only monks and nuns held to a holy life? We all are called to such high standards.

Congregationalists - for the groups who refused church hierarchy. No regional or national - no moderator or bishop or pope. Churches are groups of people who voluntarily come together and are responsible to those people who are part of that church.

And there are more not mentioned. These movements blended, pulled apart, spawned more diversity, and tried new ways to follow Jesus' Way.

Why are there thousands of Christian denominations? Because the Spirit of God blew across humanity and we began to speak in all the tongues of the world. We began to adapt our faith for local ages, local cultures, local needs.

And really, this unity in diversity didn't begin 300 years ago. It's been like this since the first Pentecost.

Just as Easter is the Christian version of the Jewish Passover; Pentecost is the Christian version of the Jewish Shavuot. During the time of the book of Acts, for Shavuot, pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem to visit the temple. So we hear "every nation under heaven" is in the city. 50 days have passed between Passover and Shavuot – "Pente-cost" means "50." This Shavuot, or Festival of the First Fruits, is a harvest festival. The pilgrims are bringing the first bit of their fields and gardens to offer to God at the temple and to celebrate the harvest. And so, symbolically, the First Fruits of Christ are presented – the first Christians. We call Pentecost the day the Church began because it is when the Holy Spirit was gifted to all.

The story goes as so: Jesus' followers are gathered together. He is gone - dead, resurrected, and now in heaven. Those he left behind are remaining in community with one another. Suddenly, there is a mighty rushing wind among them. Wind, breath, spirit - these are the same word in Hebrew.

Tongues as of fire appear above them. Recall Jesus said we would be baptized by the spirit and fire - could this be what he meant?

And they all begin to prophesy, and proclaim God's deeds, in all kinds of languages and ways. Much like 300 years ago, suddenly there was no male or female, rich or poor, young or old, free or enslaved - everyone received the Holy Spirit and everyone had an important testimony about God.

Could they be drunk?

When the Spirit is upon people... yes. I do testify, we can look drunk.

At around 15, I was dating a boy. Neither he nor I had wheels, or jobs, or two pennies to rub together, and so our dating entertainment was whatever we could walk to and was free. One Wednesday night - this happened to be a tiny church a bit smaller than the Green Bay church.

Like most churches, you walked in and there was a visitor log book. It had about 10 pews, a pulpit on a small stage, and four tall clear church windows. Like most churches, the congregation was surprised to see two teenagers show up. Like most churches, the pastor began with inviting God's presence into the place. We call this the invocation.

And then 3 meter tall speakers in each corner of the tiny chapel began worship music at full blast. I felt the sound vibrate through my entire body and cause my heart to rumble at the same tempo as the drums. Before my saucer-sized eyes, these little old women and old men stood up in the pews and began throwing their hats and scarves into the air. A man rapidly spoke glossolalia, tongues, beside me. A woman fell to the floor. I wanted to go help her, but she began to squirm and roll down the aisle in ecstasy shouting, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" There were tears - shouts - screams - people on pews and people on the floor and it was only the first song of what turned out to be an all-night revival meeting.

My boyfriend and I snuck out after an hour with ringing ears and more questions than we could express. Back at his house, still stunned, we told his mother about the experience. She laughed, "Oh yeah. We call them the holy rollers. They don't mean no harm. They just are full of God's

Spirit. So full, some of them can speak angels' language and others get slain and rise again just like Jesus. They're good people."

If the first Pentecost was similar, I understand wholly why the neighbours thought those Jesus followers were drunk. But just as my boyfriend's mom explained, and so Peter explained - these worshippers are not drunk. This is the prophecy of Joel being fulfilled when God's Spirit is poured out upon all. This is Jesus' promise fulfilled – a baptism with the Spirit and fiery souls. This is God doing a new thing. This is God fueling love in every language, every style, every culture, every nation, every way of being.

And what happened 2000 years ago, and 300 years ago, and 20 years ago is happening right now too. The Holy Spirit is like a wind, and never at rest. Always encouraging new ways of being church, new ways of approaching tradition and scripture, new ways of understanding God. The Holy Spirit is like a fire, burning away what is no longer useful or life-giving and recycling those nutrients into soil to grow what is useful and is life-giving. The Holy Spirit is like a dove, coming from on-high and alighting, landing, upon us with both blessing and peace, but also challenge and drive.

In this congregation, we have roots in the Methodist movement. Once it was required to be alcohol free in order to worship at the Little Current Wesleyan Methodist church. We even cut ties with the Anchor Inn and their natural gas pump because they sold alcohol. We invested in expensive new technology called electricity so we wouldn't be associated with alcohol.

We have roots in the Evangelical movement. Honora, Cold Springs and Little Current Presbyterian churches arose from the movement that faith alone in Christ is all that is required for salvation. You can't buy your way into heaven. You can't do enough good deeds to get to heaven. Heaven is a gift if you accept it. And if you accept it, it leads to living a life of good deeds and generosity.

We have roots in the Congregational movement. Rockville church was began by community engagement, ran by community engagement, and to this day the building is a place for community to come together.

We have roots in the Pentecostal movement. Before Methodism was a thing, John Wesley was considered Pentecostal. And to this day, we affirm all genders and ages, all life status and employment, all people are called to be ministers to one another. And therefore, anyone can be called by God to be an ordained minister.

Over the centuries, we have united. And we have divided. Even these four big movements have come together at times, and have divided. Today you'll find Pentecostal churches that teach no woman ought to be in the pulpit, and you'll find Evangelical churches who teach prosperity gospel and a focus on money as a sign of God's favour. That is opposite than their ancestors' stance. We all change. Case in point - I didn't sign a alcohol-free pledge to attend this church.

What remains the same, as Paul argues, is the Spirit of God. We are united in that Spirit. We are diverse in all our many ways and this is a good thing. We are members of one body. We are gifted different abilities and styles of worship; different insights into God and styles of living;

different wisdom and styles of theology. But we are all Christian. All united in Christ. All connected through the Holy Spirit. All serving God our Creator. All one. United in diversity.

The Spirit of God is still among us - still changing us - still encouraging us to experiment and know God in new ways.

I have no idea what the next 300 years hold - but I know they hold Christianity. I have no idea what it'll look like, and no idea how we'll gather or worship - but I know the Spirit of God is uncontrollable, coming and going like wind where God wills. I know God's promises are faithful, and we are never facing reality without God. I know we have been brought through thousands of years of change by our Good Shepherd and I trust whatever comes next, God is still guiding.

Fear not, whenever you hear Christianity is dying out - or churches are dying - fear not. The Spirit changes things - constantly - what is living is what is changing. Only that which doesn't change is dead. We serve a living God, with a living Spirit, with a resurrected living Saviour. Change is normal. Like a garden in spring, God is turning the soil and planting new seeds and changing the way things are so that there is ever greater diversity in the garden.

Fear not - whatever God is planting will be brought to harvest - and it will be very good.

Praise God for the gift of the Spirit! Amen.

Scripture Readings – May 24, 2026 – Pentecost – Little Current United Church.

Acts 2:1-21 NRSV Ue

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

² When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares,

that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

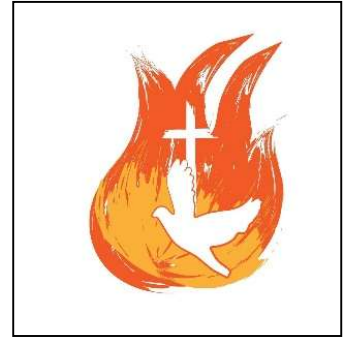
¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'



Scripture Reading #2 – May 24, 2026 – Pentecost – for Little Current United Church

1 Corinthians 12:3-13

³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, ⁵ and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

One Body with Many Members

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts

